

Atherton were quietly married, and then went abroad. When they returned, a year later, the bride had developed into a regal-looking woman of surpassing grace and sweetness, worthy in all things of the devoted affection her husband lavished on her.

Colonel Atherton, after their return from their bridal tour, had had the family diamonds reset with a splendour befitting their great value, intending his bride should wear them when presented at Court, but Lillian never went to London, never mingled, for even one brief season, in the glittering gaieties and bewildering pleasures of fashionable life.

Atherton took often saw visitors within its precincts, for the place had ever been noted for its princely hospitalities, and on such occasions Lillian's patrician beauty and feminine grace allied her husband with pardonable pride, and with admiring wonder the guests who had, perhaps, heard her criticized as proud and strait-laced, or condemned as bigoted and fanatical.

Mrs. Atherton and Margaret continued to reside with the happy couple in an affectionate intercourse that was never dimmed by a cloud, and beautiful, intelligent children grew up around them, filling the stately homestead with additional sunshine.

Both sisters, by their pure, womanly virtues, spotless lives, and active, unwearied benevolence, finally succeeded in wiping out the specks of odium that had, through so many generations, attached itself to the name of the Tremaines of Tremaine Court.

THE END.

A. B. C.

- A is an Angel of blushing eighteen; B is the Bull where the Angel was seen; C is the Chinerope who cheated at cards; D is the Deutemps with Frank of the Guards; E is her Eye, killing slowly but surely; F is the Fan, whence it passed so demurely; G is the Glove of superlative kid; H is the Hand which it spitefully hid; I is the ice which the fair one demanded; J is the Juvenile, that dainty who wanted; K is the Kerchief, a rare work of art; L is the Lace which composed the chief part; M is the Maid who watched the chit dance; N is the Nose she turned up at each glance; O is the Opera (but then in its prime); P is the Partner who wouldn't keep time; Q is the Quadrille, put instead of the Lancers; R is the Remonstrances made by the dancers; S is the Supper, where all went in pairs and stratagems; T is the Truandillo they talked on the stairs; U is the Uncle who thought 'we'd be gain'; V is the Voice that his niece replied 'No' in; W is the Waiter who sat up till night; X is the Exit, not rightly straight; Y is the Yawning fit caused by the Ball; Z stands for Zero, or nothing at all.

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TO THE BITTER END.

By Miss M. E. Braddon.

AUTHOR OF 'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET,' ETC.

CHAPTER XXIX.—(Continued.)

O, the man was mad evidently, a wretched creature whom grief had made distraught. Her first thought had been right. She glanced towards the door with a little look of terror, and rose from her chair, her first impulse being to fly. Richard Redmayne laid his hand upon her arm.

"Stop," he said, "I want you to answer a question. What do you think of a man who came to my house under a false name, came to a neighbourhood where he should have come as master and landowner; came on the sly, pretending to be a stranger; came into an honest man's house and blighted the life of his child; tempted her away from home, under a lying promise of marriage—I have my dead girl's letter to prove that—and never meant to marry her; took her to a house that he had taken under another false name; and when she died in his arms—struck dead by the discovery of his falsehood, as I know she was—within a quarter of an hour of her entrance under that roof, hid again, and swore she was his sister; then buried her in a nameless grave, far away from her home, and left her dotting father to find out, how best he might, what had become of his only child? What do you think of such a man as that, Lady Clevedon?"

"What can I think," said Georgie, who had grown very pale, "except that he was a villain?"

"A most consummate villain, eh?"

"I am glad you are honest, enough to admit that," said Richard Redmayne, flinging Grace's locket upon the table, with the false buck open, and the portrait exposed, "although the man is your husband."

"What do you mean, sir?" cried Georgie. "You must be mad to say such a thing."

"Look at that," he said, pointing to the miniature; "whose face is that, do you think?"

women even like a man better for having been a scoundrel. No, I don't suppose you will think the worse of him for having broken my Grace's heart."

"How dare you talk to me like that? If I thought—if I could for a moment believe that he had ever done so base a thing, ever been so false and cruel! But I am foolish and wicked to tremble like this. As if he ever could have done anything base, as if he could have been a coward and a deceiver! How dare you come here to try and frighten me with this senseless accusation?"

"You have your husband's picture in your hand—the locket he sent my daughter?"

"Do you think I will believe that?" cried Georgie, with a desperate courage, ready to defy this man—may, Fate itself—rather than acknowledge that her idol could err. "How can I tell by what means you came by this locket? You may have found it somewhere, and invented this hateful story."

"It was a love-gift to my daughter; there are plenty who know that. There is a secret spring, you see—the portrait is not meant for common eyes—quite a lover's trick. And this man was false and secret in all he did."

"The picture proves nothing," Georgie said, with recovered firmness, "and your accusation is as ridiculous as it is offensive. My husband only came to England last year; until that time he had lived entirely abroad."

"Were you with him all the time, that you can answer for him so boldly? People come backwards and forwards sometimes, even without telling all their friends about it. I have been to Brisbane and back twice within the last seven years. That man came to Brierwood under a false name, and amused himself looking about his own estate, I suppose, on the sly; and when he got tired of that, amused himself with breaking my daughter's heart. He came recommended by John Wort, the steward; and when I wanted to hunt him down, John Wort stood between him and my vengeance. Fate sent me here to-day, or I might never have known the name of my daughter's murderer."

"I will not believe it," repeated Georgie, but this time in a helpless hopeless tone, that was very pitiful. O God! the case seemed made out so fully, and that miniature in her hand was so strong a corroboration of the miserable story. What motive could this man have for torturing her with a fabrication? Were the accusation ever so false—and false it must be—the accuser spoke in good faith."

She put her hands before her face, trying to be calm, to quiet the fast-growing confusion of her brain.

"There is some mistake," she said at last. "I am very sorry for you; but believe me, you are completely wrong in your suspicion of my husband. If I do not know every detail of his past life—and I think I do, for he has told me so much about himself—I know, at least, that he is good and honorable, utterly incapable of a base or cowardly action. I should be most unworthy of his love and trust, if I could think ill of him. I cannot tell how this mistake may have arisen, or how you came by that locket; but I can say—yes, with the utmost confidence—that my husband is guiltless of any wrong against you or your daughter."

She raised her head proudly, looking Francis Clevedon's slanders full in the face. Even if he were guilty, it was her duty to defend him; but she could not think him guilty. Circumstances might lie, but not Francis Clevedon.

Richard Redmayne surveyed her with a half-contemptuous pity.

"Of course you'll stand by him," he said; "stand me out that he wasn't there, that the portrait you've got in your hand is somebody else's portrait. Women are always ready to do that sort of thing. I'm very sorry for you, Lady Clevedon; but I mean to have some kind of reckoning with this truthful and honourable husband of yours. I mean to let the world hereabouts know what kind of a gentleman Sir Francis Clevedon is. Where can I find him?"

"You are not going to talk about this wretched business before everybody—to make a scene?" cried Georgie, with a woman's natural horror of open scandal.

"I mean to have it out with Sir Francis whenever and wherever I see him. Give me back that locket, if you please."

He took it from Georgie's hand, and fled to this watch-tower.

"You cannot see Sir Francis this evening; it is quite impossible."

"I'll find that out for myself," he said, passing her, and going out of the room.

Georgie followed him into the hall, where he paused, looking about him with a puzzled air. A couple of men-servants were lounging by the open door, and Georgie felt herself safe. If necessary, she would order them to turn this man out of the house. She would do rather than see her husband assailed in the midst of his friends. Who could tell what mischief such an accusation might do him in the estimation of his little world, however baseless the charge might be?

Mr. Redmayne went up to one of the servants, and asked whether Sir Francis was still in the house.

"No, sir; my master went back to the grounds just now with General Cheviot," answered the man, looking at Richard Redmayne's pale face and loosened neckerchief with some astonishment. He was not one of the house visitors, and had clearly no business in that place; yet he looked too respectable a person to have any sinister motive for his intrusion—a gentleman who had been overcome by bitter beer or champagne, perhaps, and had wandered this way in mere purposeless merriment.

"How long is it since he went out?" asked Richard impatiently. "What do you mean by 'just now'?"

"Ten minutes, if you want to be exact," answered the man, who replied the retainer, with an offended air. "And, I say, if you're one of the tenants, this ain't the place as you're invited to. There's the tenants' marquee—that's your place."

Rick Redmayne passed him without deigning to notice this reproach. If Francis Clevedon had gone back to the grounds, it was his business to follow him. It mattered little where they met, so long as they met speedily.

Georgie had remained by the library door, almost hidden by the deep embrasure. She came out into the hall when Richard Redmayne was gone.

"Yes, my lady; perhaps I'd better go myself."

"Yes, yes, I think you had. And be sure you tell Sir Francis I wish to speak to him at once."

She stood in the porch for a little while, watching the footman as he crossed the lawn, making his way in and out among the company with tolerable celerity. She watched him till he was out of sight, and then went slowly up the broad oak staircase to the room with the oriel window, and flung herself on her knees before her pet arm-chair, and buried her head in the silken pillows, and sobbed as if her heart were broken. Yet she told herself over and over again that, come what might, she would never believe him guilty. But what if, when she told him Richard Redmayne's accusation, as she meant to tell it, word for word—what if he should admit the justice of the charge, strike her dumb by the confession of his infamy? He infamous, he a traitor, he who had so often told her that his past life did not hold act or thought that he cared to keep secret from her! He stood before her unabashed, in the character of a cold-blooded seducer! The thing was not possible. And then she remembered the face that had smiled at her in the locket—his face, and no other. No thought of Hubert Harcross, and t at notorious likeness between the two men, ever flashed across her brain. Her mind was too full of that one image. Love narrows the universe to a circle hardly wider than a wedding-ring. She could not look beyond the husband of her choice and the shadow that had come between them.

She rose from her knees at last, after vainly endeavouring to pray, and went to the open window, keeping herself hidden behind the silken curtain, and looking out across the idle crowds with that brazen dance music sounding in her ears—the slender thread of the last street song spun out to attenuation in the last popular waltz.

He would deny, he would explain, she told herself again and again, angry with her own weak spirit for wavering ever so little, yet not able altogether to overcome a sickening sense of fear. If he would only come, and hear her strange story, and set everything right with a few words!

"He has but to look me in the face, and tell me how deeply I have wronged him, and my heart will be at rest," she said to herself, straining her eyes in their search for that one familiar figure.

She could not see him, and he did not come to her. She would have gone in quest of him herself, but that would have been to run the risk of missing him altogether, should he have received her message, and been on this way to her room. In that large house, and in those crowded grounds, it was so easy to miss any one. No, it was wiser to wait; and she waited, looking at the villagers dancing in the sunset, at the lights beginning to shine out one by one among the trees, as the evening shadows deepened, looking at them without seeing them.

CHAPTER XXX.

AND THERE NEVER WAS MOONLIGHT SO SWEET AS THIS.

Weston Vallory, being freed from his duties by the breaking-up of the party in the red-fogged tent a considerable time before Lady Clevedon's encounter with Mr. Redmayne, lost no time in seeking his rustic flame, whom he discovered with some trouble seated a little way apart from the revellers, amidst a cluster of pine trees, with Hubert Harcross stretched at her feet.

"I want to know why you used me so cruelly, Miss Bond," he said, with an air of being profoundly afflicted by her desertion. "I thought you had promised to sit next me at dinner."

"Did I?" giggled the coquettish Jane, bridling and smirking after her kind. "I'm sure I didn't remember anything about it. But you do bother so, there's no knowing what one says."

"Upon my soul, I consider your conduct most heartless," drawled Weston—"leaving me to the tender mercies of a stout lady in the laundress interest, and her still stouter sister-in-law who mangles. It was like sitting between two animated feather-beds, with the thermometer at ninety-two—a sort of Turkish bath, without any douches. I should have danced out there, in a blue and white cap, and exercised for reducing my weight. I should think, will you do anything for me?"

"No, thank you," answered for the Lancers, and I don't care to dance anything else."

"What, not even the yellow sands, and there take hands, and so on? No down the middle, and partners, and that kind of thing?"

"You, my dear, amused Miss Bond languidly, and being herself with her pocket-handkerchief. It's too hot for dancing."

She glanced archly at Mr. Harcross, who had lifted himself into a sitting position, and was surveying Weston lugubly between his half-closed eyelids.

"You're better engaged," said Mr. Vallory, turning on his heel.

"A paltry triumph; but Mr. Harcross's malicious gratification in 'taking it out' of Weston, even in so small a matter as this. There are people who seem to occupy the same rank in the social scale as cock-buzzards—the only possible pleasure we can have in relation with them is in treading upon them."

"If this, he was bound to devote himself to the amusement of his society. They strolled away from the crowd, and that wearying sound of popular dance music, walked into the wilder part of the park, and Mr. Harcross tried to abandon himself to the amusement of the moment. He contented himself in the analysis of this vain shallow nature; mad: the girl told him all about herself—her engagement to Joseph Flood, her flirtation with Weston Vallory, and those foolish dreams of some high fortune awaiting her in the future, which that insidious flatterer had awakened in her mind. He gave the girl a little good advice upon this; warned her to beware of such flatterers as Weston Vallory, whose hom age was very worthless compared to the honest attachment of Mr. Flood.

"As for the good fortune which may befall a pretty girl like you," the right man happens to come across her pathway, that must always remain an unknown quantity," he said gravely; "but I believe that, for one pretty girl who marries above her station, there are a hundred

pretty girls who live and die happily enough—perhaps quite as happily as the hundred-and-odd—on their own sphere. I wouldn't break Mr. Flood's heart, if I were you, for the sake of a hypothetical remainder."

"I'm sure I like Joseph well enough," the girl answered, shrugging her shoulders, and not at all gratified by the practical turn which the conversation had taken. "I know he's very fond of me, and has stood more from me than most men would stand from any girl. He'd been following me over a year before I ever said a civil word to him—following me as faithful as a dog; but he's so common! And if I marry him, I shall have to work hard all my life."

"My dear Miss Bond, if you married a duke, you'd have to work a great deal harder."

"What, do duchesses work?"

"Like galley-slaves. And you'd have to work harder than a duchess to the manner born; for first, you'd have to learn how to play your part—the stage business, as actors say—and then to play it. Upon my word, if you wish to take life easily, I wouldn't recommend you to aspire to the peerage. An honest husband, a tidy cottage, and a little garden, with roses and sweet-thriller and honeysuckle climbing about one's windows—good heavens! I can imagine no existence more perfect than a cottage; shared with the being one loves. Unhappily, it is only when we begin to descend the slope of the hill that we discover what the perfection of human life means."

He was thinking of the cottage at Highgate which he had meant to make so bright a bower, and of the bird that had flown heavenward from that fatal nest. "If I had only known!" That was the perpetual refrain of his lament, the throedy which his soul was continually singing. Miss Bond found this somewhat serious conversation less entertaining than Weston's soft nothings; but there was a satisfaction in the idea of taking a solitary stroll with one of the gentlemen stewards instead of dancing with the common herd, who made themselves so obnoxiously red and warm and breathless with their exertions, and as it were, a spectacle for the eyes of non-dancing mankind; like wine-flushed helots gyrating for the warning and instruction of Spartan youth.

Perhaps the best part of the whole business, to Miss Bond's mind, the circumstance that gave zest and flavour to this quiet saunter, was the idea that Joseph Flood, lashed into fury by the pangs of jealousy, was following her at a little distance, under cover of the wood, meditating vengeance upon her and her companion; and gnashing his teeth in impotent rage. The damsel had something of the angler's instinct, and it was nothing to have hooked her fish unless she could have the pleasure of playing him a little, to his ineffable torture.

"I shall have a nice scene with Joseph tomorrow, I desay," she said to Mr. Harcross.

"What will he be jealous—even of me?"

"Lord bless your heart, I should think he would. He can't abide for me to speak to any one. I think he'd like to have me under lock and key in Maidstone jail rather than that I should enjoy myself a bit, making froe with a stranger."

Weston Vallory walked away from the grassy circle on which the dancers were despoiling themselves, smarting under Miss Bond's rebuff, and vindictively disposed towards Mr. Harcross as the primary cause of his humiliation. It was a very small thing, of course, this repulse from a port village beauty. Mr. Vallory admired the damsel, but it is not to be supposed he cared for her; and yet he felt the affront as keenly as if he had been stung by a woman he adored. He was a man who felt small injuries; indeed his whole existence was made up of petty things. He had never cherished a wide aspiration in the whole course of his career. His value as a business man had chiefly consisted in his appreciation of detail, his rapid perception of minutiae. He was a man who deeply resented trifling affronts; and an affront from Hubert Harcross was thrice as bitter to him as an affront from any one else. That unforgiven wrong concerning Augusta rankled and festered. It seemed as if this man was always blocking his pathway; and after having spoiled the entire scheme of his life, must needs oust him even in so trivial a matter as a flirtation with a pretty peasant girl.

After this vexation he was in no humour for any further exertions for the amusement of the populace. He had been immeasurably weary of the banquet in the tent, the stifling heat, and the riot. Had he not been bound to perform his duties imposed on him by Lady Clevedon, as an agreeable manner, so as to secure his future consideration in a very pleasant house, he would have seen this vulgar herd sunbath in the nethermost shades of Orcus sooner than he would have endured so much of their company; but of course he must fall in with the humour of the châteline if he wished to secure a healthy welcome at Clevedon in seasons to come; and as the house was agreeable, the evening irrepensible, his bedchamber spacious and facing the south-east, he did not object to take some trouble to please his hostess. The thing was done, however; and he washed his hands of those bucolic swains and their apple-checked sweethearts. He left them to tread their measures without him, and strolled away towards the sunny old garden, where Lady Clevedon was accustomed to hold her kettledrum.

There was no kettledrum in the garden this afternoon. Times and seasons were out of joint; those formal meals which mark the passing hours upon the social dial were exploded, or topsy-turvised. It was now five o'clock, and the luncheon in the great dining-hall was only just over; servants were dispensing coffee on the terrace, where the aristocratic guests had gathered to watch the dancing, and some of them to do a little flirtation on their own account. Mr. Vallory had no more inclination to join this privileged class than to caper with panting nymphs and shepherds on the sunlit grass. In plain English, Mr. Vallory was out of temper, and wanted to calm himself down with a quiet cigar. He was very glad to find the garden deserted, the roses and carnations wasting their sapidity on the empty summer air. He smoked a couple of cigars, strolling up and down the broad gravel walk leading to Lady Clevedon's favourite summer-house; and when he grew tired of this recreation, seated himself comfortably in the summer-house, with his back against the wall and his legs stretched luxuriously upon a rustic chair. He sat thus, basking in the afternoon sunshine and meditating his injuries.

"Let me only get up a good case; put this little story of Miss Brierwood—no, Redmayne—and the lodger into a practicable form, and I

shall lose no farther time in letting my cousin Augusta know what kind of a husband she secured for herself when she jilted me. I wonder how she would take it if I uncarthd Miss Redmayne for her, and convinced her that my friend Harcross is a scoundrel. I darsay she'd make a good deal of fuss about it, and threaten no end of legal separations, and in the end forgive him; women, generally do; and yet she's a little out of the common line. I hardly think she'd stomach any carrying-on of that kind. No; I think if I once opened her eyes upon the subject, my friend Harcross would have a bad time of it."

The sunshine, which glared full upon the summer-house at this time, began to grow troublesome, so Mr. Vallory left that retreat and sauntered towards the house. The cockatoo was screaming on his perch, and he went across the grass to it, and amused himself a little at the creature's expense; then growing speedily weary of its indignant gobblings and snappings, he looked into the library, and seeing no one in the spacious cool-looking chamber, went in, and planted himself comfortably in an easy-chair by one of the windows, shut in completely from the rest of the room by one of those seven-foot-high bookcases which jutted out from the wall. In this sheltered nook he found Punch, and a new magazine or two, just sufficient literature wherewith to read himself to sleep. He opened one of the magazines, turned over the leaves listlessly, read half a page or so, and anon slumbered, letting the book glide gently from his relaxing hand. This happened about an hour before Richard Redmayne confronted Lady Clevedon in that room.

Nothing could be more placid than Weston Vallory's repose. The burden of his annoyances slipped away from him in the sensual delight of that perfect rest in a supremely comfortable chair, in a cool quiet room, with the balmy breath of summer stealing gently across his face as he slept. For a long time his sleep was dreamless, his brain empty of every impression; then came a semi-consciousness of something, he knew not what, going on near him, a vague idea that he ought to be awake and up, and that he must break loose from that delicious bondage of drowsiness; and then, growing gradually louder, clearer, sharper, the sound of a man's passionate voice.

He pulled himself up suddenly at last, and sat with open eyes and ears listening to a speaker who was only divided from him by that screen of books. His chair was placed in the extreme angle formed by the bookcase and the wall, so that he was entirely hidden from any one in the centre of the room.

He awoke in time to hear the speaker say, "You have heard of me perhaps, Lady Clevedon; my name is Richard Redmayne."

He heard this, and all that followed this, and was quick to perceive that the farmer had taken Sir Francis Clevedon for Hubert Harcross.

"A strange turn for events to take," he said to himself; and I should imagine very likely to lead up to a crisis. Now I know what kind of man this Redmayne is, I shall be able to tackle him. A passionate fellow, it seems; a fellow who would stick at nothing, I should think, when his blood is up."

He smiled—a slow meditative smile. "Upon my word, I don't believe Mr. Harcross has heard the last of this Redmayne's daughter," he thought, as he rose from his seat in the corner and peered cautiously into the room. It was quite empty; but Mr. Vallory preferred to make his retreat by the garden, whence he departed in quest of Richard Redmayne.

"I'll take the trouble to enlighten him as to the traitor's identity," he said to himself. "Francis Clevedon is a good fellow, and it's too bad that he should carry the burden of another man's sin upon his shoulders."

He spent some time looking for Mr. Redmayne among the crowd, but failed to find him, and was ultimately pounced upon by Colonel Davenant and told-off upon some new duty of his stewardship, to his extreme aggravation.

When the shadows thickened in the wood Mr. Harcross and his companion went back to the lawn, where the talk and the laughter and the music had grown louder. The local band had now emerged from retirement, and were braying furiously, refreshed with strong drink, and more bold than careful in their instrumentation. Mr. Harcross and Jane Bond danced the Lancers in the twilight, while the lamps were being lighted in the wood, to the edification of Joseph Flood, who sat on a bench a little way off, biting his nails and watching them; and after the Lancers were over, Mr. Harcross gave Miss Bond a lesson in waltzing, the damsel having grown somewhat reckless by this time, and not caring whether her father did or did not see her indulging in this forbidden exercise. Mrs. Harcross, who was sauntering out and fro with a Kentish magnate, distinguished her husband's figure among the dancers. She was a little surprised that he should push the duty of his stewardship so far, but had no jealousy of rustic beauties, only a languid disapproval of so unnecessary a concession. She might have approved had he been canvassing the county, and these people his constituents. And so the day waned, the coloured lamps shone out of the dusky branches of the trees and twinkled round the margins of the fountain. Youthful minds began to languish for the fireworks; more weary spirits had a frequent recourse to the tonic where refreshments were liberally dispensed. The Colonel began to grow a little uneasy in his mind as the crowd grew merrier. He had organised everything to perfection except the dispersal of his guests.

"But they'll all go directly after the fireworks, of course," he said to Mr. Wort, who stood beside him at the entrance to the chief tent.

"The steward groaned aloud.

"No," he said; "yes, if I can find barriers enough to wheel 'em all away upon. That's about the only chance there is of their going, I take it."

Joseph Flood had consumed his share of the strong ale dealt out to the thirsty dancers, had tried to drown the green-eyed monster in cool draughts of wholesome malt liquor; but the more he drowned the demon the stronger it grew, until the groom's brain was on fire, and his mind distracted with darker thoughts that had ever entered it before.

The first lesson in the divine art of waltzing, under the harvest moon, whose calm yellow splendour rose high above those lesser earthly lights of green and red and blue and silver twinkling among the dark foliage, that novel sensation of revolving gently to the sound of